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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 003885

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: BAGHDAD: DISPLACED PERSONS RETURNING HOME

REF: BAGHDAD 2737

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Patricia A. Butenis for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) This message contains an action request. See Para 19.

12. (C) SUMMARY and COMMENT: Families displaced from their homes in Baghdad have begun returning, according to Post and PRT contacts, officials at the Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM), and local press reports. While returns are taking place throughout Iraq, the trend appears more prevalent in Baghdad than in other provinces, and may continue to accelerate should security gains consolidate. MoDM estimates that only 26,000 displaced persons -- a fraction of the UNHCR-estimated 4.4 million total displacements both inside and outside of the country -- have actually come back to their homes throughout Iraq since January. The true number of returnees remains unclear, but the emerging trend demands urgent attention. We and Iraqi officials worry that if the current pace continues or increases then returnees may destabilize the very neighborhoods whose tenuous return to stability has precipitated their movement home.

13. (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT C'TD: The Prime Minister has not taken steps to provide the financial resources, policy direction, or ministerial mandate that MoDM requires in order to provide adequate services to returnees and to prevent the problems that Iraqi officials anticipate. To influence and prod the development of a Government of Iraq (GoI) plan, the Ambassador will send a series of recommendations to the Prime Minister. Key international actors -- UNHCR, International Organization of Migration (IOM), and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) -- have yet to commit adequate resources on the ground to respond to the developing situation. We need to press UNHCR, IOM and ICRC on multiple fronts to increase or renew their involvement in Baghdad and to extend greater assistance to the GoI. END SUMMARY and COMMENT.

MOUNTING INDICATIONS THAT RETURNS ARE ON THE RISE

14. (C) Local press accounts and interviews conducted by Post, Baghdad PRT and EPRTs with various District Council members, local contacts across Baghdad, and officials at the Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM) report that

families displaced from their homes in Baghdad have begun returning. (NOTE: Coalition Forces report that they have received some limited information to sustain the claim that IDPs are returning in parts of Baghdad. END NOTE.) MoDM counts as "returnees" those who previously registered as displaced. MoDM reports that 4,291 internally displaced families (or approximately 25,746 individuals) returned to their homes across Iraq between January and October 2007. Of this total number, 3,363 families (20,178 individuals) returned to their homes in Baghdad. MoDM reports that about 6,000 additional displaced families (36,000 individuals) claim to have returned to their homes in Baghdad, but MoDM officials are still in the process of verifying their returns. More displaced families have returned to homes in Baghdad than to any other province, likely because Baghdad -- according to MoDM and all local and international organizations that track IDPs -- is the point of origin for more than half of those displaced since February 2006, and also because of a well-publicized improvement in Baghdad's security conditions.

15. (SBU) Several organizations track the movement of displaced persons both inside and outside of Iraq (reftel), but none of these organizations provides an authoritative number of displacements or returns. UNHCR coordinates the monthly United Nations (UN) "Cluster F Report," which incorporates information about displaced persons accumulated by 11 UN agencies. Cluster F does not/not track IDP or refugee returns. Only MoDM tracks IDP returns, but the process of registering the return of an IDP requires a significant amount of time and paperwork. It will likely take a month or two for MoDM data processing to reflect the returns currently taking place. Although MoDM reports about 26,000 IDP returns, Iraqi media and local contacts report a much higher number of IDP returns to Baghdad.

16. (U) IOM has conducted surveys that indicate the majority of IDPs wish to return home. In response to IOM survey questions, Iraqi IDPs overwhelmingly identify direct threats to life as the reason they fled their homes, and state that they were specifically targeted because of their religion or sect. The surveys also show that most IDPs come from Baghdad (67.1%), Diyala (17.3%) and Al Anbar (5.3%).

GOI OFFICIALS EXPRESS CONCERN

17. (C) GoI officials at all levels -- including the Prime Minister and Minister of Displacement and Migration Abd Al-Samad Sultan, as well as Provincial, District and Neighborhood Council members -- have expressed concern about the potential problems posed by returnees. The most frequently mentioned concerns include:

- Some areas appear to have calmed down after militants drove out all the members of one sect; returnees from the displaced sect might provide militants justification to resume threats and attacks.
- Returnees may undermine fragile reconciliation efforts by shifting the demographic balance in certain areas -- a concern in the run-up to provincial elections, given the potential for gerrymandering for political purposes.
- Some returnees will find their homes destroyed, damaged or occupied by squatters. They may react violently or enlist the support of local militants to evict squatters or exact revenge.
- Many squatters are themselves displaced; their eviction from homes they currently occupy may precipitate a "domino" effect of evictions across the province, which may de-stabilize many areas.
- Returnees will place even more demand on already strained essential services, possibly precipitating conflict with residents who remained in their homes and diminishing confidence in the government.
- A handful of well-publicized attacks on returning families could discourage further returns.
- A deterioration in security conditions could displace

returnees again.

GOI MANAGEMENT OF IDP AND REFUGEE RETURNS TO DATE

18. (C) The Prime Minister has not yet provided the financial resources, policy direction, or ministerial mandate that MoDM requires in order to provide adequate services to returnees and to prevent the problems that GoI officials anticipate. As a result, the GoI has thus far managed returns in an ad hoc manner. Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) have unevenly enforced laws against squatting by refusing to enforce eviction orders in some instances, while forcibly evicting squatting IDPs in other areas in the middle of the night. (NOTE: Multi-National Division Baghdad (MND-B) intervened to stop a forced eviction by the ISF in the Karkh district of Baghdad, and Coalition Forces halted an eviction in progress in the Saydiyah neighborhood of Baghdad's Rusafa district. END NOTE.) Local Iraqi officials have repeatedly requested U.S. assistance in evicting squatters from public and private property, while provincial and national officials appear ambivalent about such a role for Coalition Forces.

19. (C) Limited documentation to prove ownership and allegations of forged property deeds add further confusion to the situation, causing the Coalition to pause its direct involvement in settling these disputes. (NOTE: Coalition Forces have determined that they will not take part in any relocations or forced evictions in the absence of an official and publicly pronounced GoI policy. However, Coalition Forces do not have guidance that would bar any support to IDPs who possess proof of residency and seek to return to their vacant homes. END NOTE.) In a further sign of its confusion, the GoI has repeatedly suspended, due to allegations of corruption, an incentive program started last spring to provide one million Iraqi dinars (USD 800) to displaced families returning to Baghdad. Local officials also report that even when communities are safe enough for displaced people to return, they are reluctant to invite returns through the media because doing so might prompt attacks on returnees.

USG CONTRIBUTIONS

110. (U) USAID/OFDA has five implementing partner organizations (ACTED, IOM, International Medical Corps, Mercy Corps, and IRD) presently working with IDPs in all 18 governorates. To date, these organizations have targeted assistance to reach approximately 550,000 of the most vulnerable IDP beneficiaries. Activities include provision of emergency relief supplies (food and non-food), water system and infrastructure rehabilitation, small scale livelihood and cash for work activities, and support for mobile medical teams and emergency health programs. USAID/OFDA also funds humanitarian organizations to collect data on IDP movements and needs in order to prioritize humanitarian assistance and, in conjunction with the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, support capacity-building programs for the MoDM at both the national and local levels.

111. (U) In fiscal year 2007, USAID/OFDA obligated \$37 million for humanitarian assistance to IDPs in Iraq, and will obligate an additional \$26 million by the end of calendar year 2007 to continue providing support to IDPs and returnees. Discussions about fiscal year 2008 supplemental resources have been initiated and OFDA has requested \$80 million for Iraq IDPs. Since fiscal year 2003, OFDA has contributed \$228 million in humanitarian assistance to vulnerable populations in Iraq.

POST TO MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS TO PRIME MINISTER...

112. (C) The Ambassador will urge the Prime Minister to issue

as soon as possible an Executive Order valid for 12 months that includes the following five provisions:

- MoDM will serve as the lead GoI coordinating body for refugees, IDPs, and migrants.
- MoDM must establish and chair a single, authoritative, inter-ministerial committee on refugees, IDPs and migrants, which will be supported by a robustly-staffed secretariat.
- MoDM must develop as soon as possible a "National Policy."
- MoDM and its inter-ministerial committee must prioritize development of a clear policy that delineates the role of Iraqi Security Forces and Coalition Forces in handling IDPs and returnees, to be completed and announced as soon as possible.
- MoDM and its inter-ministerial committee must also delineate a coordinated legal framework for handling problems related to IDPs and returnees, to be completed and announced as soon as possible.

¶13. (C) The Ambassador will also urge the Prime Minister to propose that the 2008 MoDM budget be substantially increased from its projected level of 9 million USD during the Council of Representatives' review of the 2008 national budget. USAID will investigate the possibility of funding a capacity-building program for MoDM to commence in January.

..AND PRESS FOR MORE INTERNATIONAL INVOLVEMENT

¶14. (C) Addressing the challenges of returning IDPs and refugees requires a far more robust presence, on the ground in Baghdad as well as throughout Iraq, of the international actors with the expertise to map and assess emerging trends as well as capacity, vocation and experience to provide the GoI with necessary technical and other assistance. UNAMI officials report that they are fully committed to assist the GoI in putting in place measures to ensure that those who return voluntarily can do so safely and with the appropriate material and legal support. Accordingly, UNHCR, as a first step, is preparing to provide 5,000 families material assistance including blankets, kitchen equipment and other material support to help in the returnees' re-integration into their communities.

¶15. (C) UNHCR has one permanent representative assigned to serve in Iraq; he arrived at the end of September and returned to Geneva in mid-October. According to a UNHCR and UNAMI officials, he may not return to Iraq. UNHCR also occasionally dispatches rovers to Baghdad, one or two at a time; two arrived November 25 and may stay for several weeks, and another rover is scheduled to arrive in early December. (NOTE: IOM also has one permanent representative in country and also occasionally dispatches a rover. END NOTE.) According to UNHCR Senior External Affairs Officer Marco Roggia, UNHCR has 15 expatriate officers in Amman dedicated exclusively to Iraq, and five expatriates in Damascus working only on Iraq.

¶16. (SBU) The following figures -- drawn from UNHCR and UNAMI officials and from UNHCR's website -- place UNHCR's presence in Iraq in the context of its presence in Colombia and Sudan:

- According to UNHCR, Colombia has the most IDPs in the world, estimated at 2 million. UNHCR has approximately 200 staff, including expatriates and local nationals, in Colombia.
- Iraq has an estimated 1.4 million IDPs, the second-most IDPs in the world, according to UNHCR. UNHCR has no permanent staff and no local staff in Iraq, but it does work with local national partners.
- Sudan has the third most IDPs in the world, estimated at 850,000, according to UNHCR. UNHCR has approximately 300 staff, including expatriates and local nationals, in Sudan.

¶17. (U) UNHCR operates inside Iraq within the framework of the UN country team, composed of 16 UN agencies and programs and two affiliated bodies, namely IOM (a USAID partner) and

the World Bank. UN mandates guide the work of the UN country team and the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) provides overall coordination for UN agencies and affiliates. UNHCR, however, is the lead agency for protection and coordination of IDPs and refugees within the UN system in Iraq.

¶18. (C) The ICRC Iraq program is staffed by 473 personnel, including 58 expatriates in Amman and Iraq. ICRC has a limited expatriate presence in-country, but does not coordinate with UNAMI and has evaded direct questions from Coalition Force officers as to the size of its Mission in country. UNAMI officials could not confirm for Post the size of the ICRC presence in Iraq. Under its agreement with the Iraqi Red Crescent Society (IRCS), ICRC supplies relief items to IRCS branches for distribution to IDPs and host communities in the areas of Najaf, Karbala, Kirkuk, Irbil, Mosul, Wasit, Anbar, Salahadin, Diwaniya, Babel, Nasiriya and Maysan. Assistance includes both food and non-food items.

ACTION REQUEST

¶19. (C) Post requests high level outreach to UNAMI, UNHCR, IOM, ICRC and other appropriate actors at their headquarters to initiate and/or substantially increase engagement on the ground in order to mitigate the potentially destabilizing impact on an already tenuous Baghdad security environment of a dramatic spike in returning IDPs and refugees. Post believes it equally appropriate to approach prominent international partners as part of an effort to mobilize greater engagement by UNAMI, UNHCR, IOM, ICRC and other entities with appropriate expertise, realizing that the UN Department of Political Affairs currently sets UNAMI's staff ceiling at 85 expatriates. (NOTE: Special Representative of the Secretary-General Stefano Di Mistura told Ambassador Satterfield November 25 that he will request that 100 more expatriates join his staff within six months. END NOTE.)
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